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ABSTRACT

This book calls into question the degree to which early childhood experiences affect psychological development, critiquing three related myths: (1) personality is formed by early childhood experiences; (2) mental disorders are caused by early childhood experiences; and (3) effective psychotherapy depends on reconstructing childhood experiences. Favoring genetic factors and non-familial environmental factors over early experiences as influences on personality, this book discusses research indicating the importance of genetic predispositions in the causation of mental disorders and describes the need to place greater value on the quality of the relationship between patient and therapist than on the link between the past and the present as a curative factor. The book is organized into five sections. Chapters in Parts 1 and 2 focus on the impact of childhood experience on adult life: (1) "Establishing Cause and Effect"; (2) "The Primacy of Early Experience"; (3) "Adversity and Outcome"; (4) "Resilience: Surviving a Bad Childhood"; (5) "Childhood, History, and Society"; (6) "Childhood and Psychoanalysis"; (7) "The Myth of Recovered Memory"; and (8) "Childhood, Attachment, and Behavior." Chapters in Part 3 deal with the relationship between childhood experience and psychological problems: (9) "Genes, Behavior, and Symptoms"; and (10) "Personality and Psychopathology." Chapters in Part 4 address the role of childhood experiences in the practice of psychotherapy: (11) "Childhood in Psychotherapy"; and (12) "Temperament and Psychotherapy." Chapters in Part 5 address the implications of studies of childhood for parenting and suggests directions for future research: (13) "Parenting"; and (14) "What We Do and Don't Know about Childhood." (KB)

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